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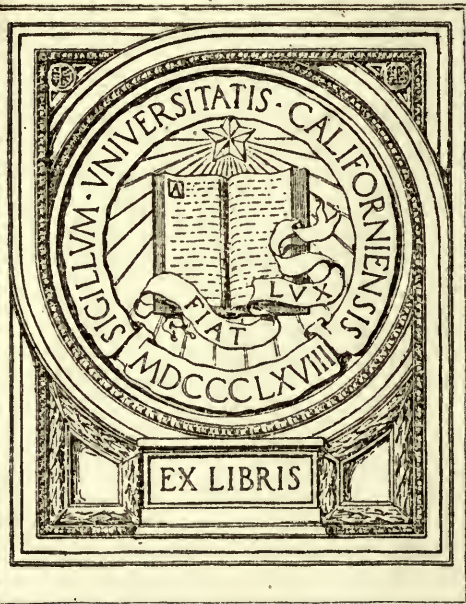
THE GRAVEDIGGER

BY FRED EMERSON BROOKS

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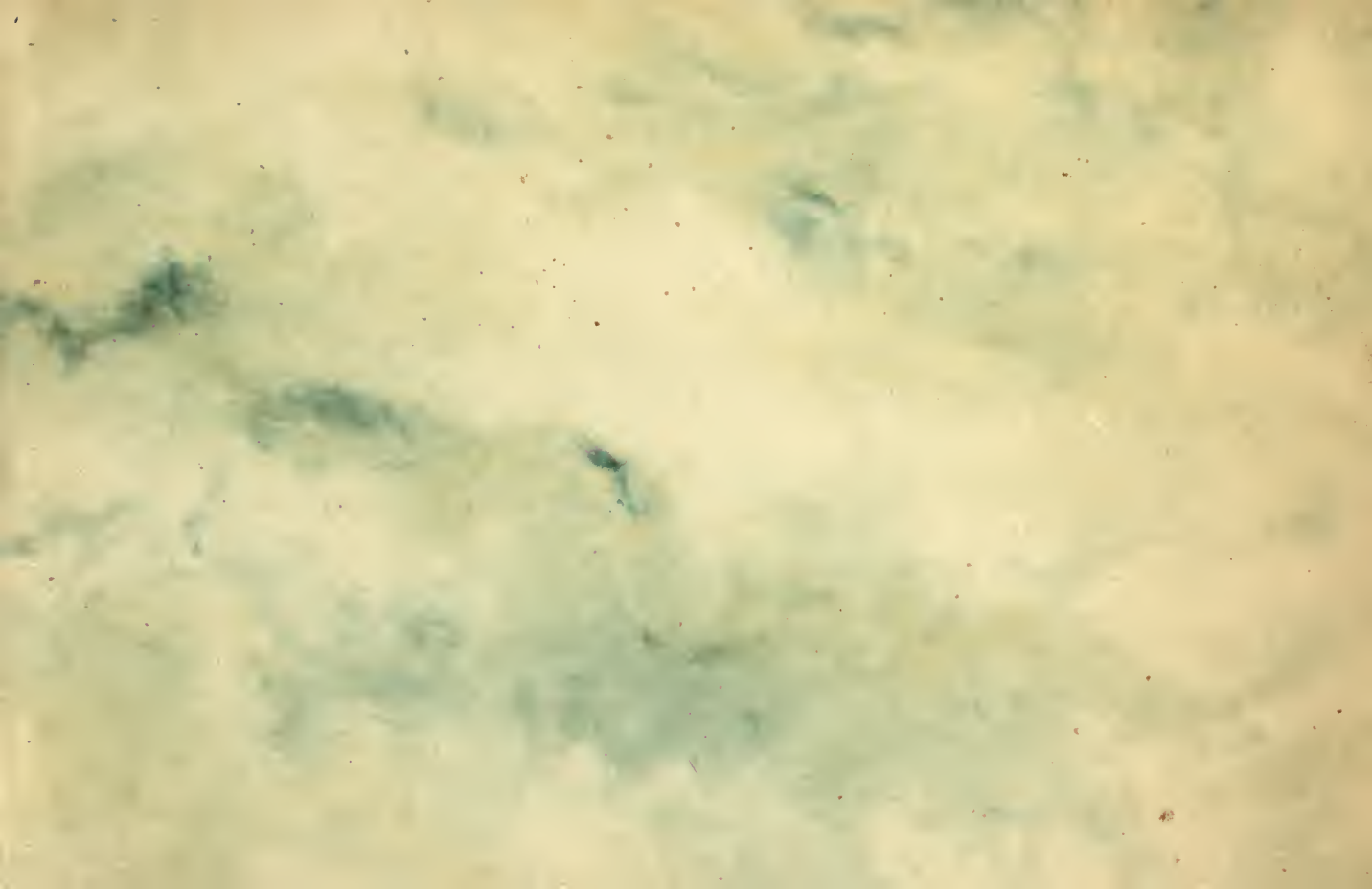
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Albin Putzker



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Professor Albin Putzker
of the University of California

with the profound admiration of the author
for his literary genius

Fred Emerson Brooks

A heart-token from

Mrs. Fred Emerson Brooks

and her mother, Mrs. Anna Jehu

for you love of the Captain



The Gravedigger

By

FRED EMERSON BROOKS



Printed at **The Roycroft Shops**

EAST AURORA, N. Y.

MCMXVI

add'l

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BY
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FLINT, MICHIGAN

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The Gravedigger

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I

AURORA'S steeds the darkness put to flight:
Her golden arrows shoot athwart the dawn,
To rouse the laggard tenants of the night.
With rosy fingers tipped with morning light
She plucks the dewdrops from the jeweled lawn.

II

THE swallow dips unto the pebbled stream
That runs away some purpose to fulfil:
To tempt the poet's song, the painter's dream,
Some barren patch of nature to redeem,
Assuage the meadow's thirst or turn a mill.



III

KIND Nature solves her riddle on her scroll;
Who solves the riddle of the man? asked I:
What is eternal life and what the goal
Of spirit radium we call the soul?
I sought among the dead to get reply.

IV

FOUND a digger spading out a hole;
“What enterprise?” I asked. He doffed his hat
And then to help his brain he scratched his poll:
“A grave I dig for some departed soul
Who left his carcass here,” and then he spat.

V

TIS not for sympathy I dig, but pay;
The dirt 's thrown in upon the selfsame terms;
Let common corpses molder how they may,
He was embalmed to last till Judgment-Day
To please his friends and disappoint the worms.

VI

BUT yesterday a millionaire I 'm told;
A winding-sheet for all his hoarded gains;
At last he knows what truth the Scriptures hold;
Now penniless, his heirs have all the gold
Except the trifle paid me for my pains.



VII

IN taking toll, he overtook his share
And found what profit lies in hoarding pelf;
Deemed arrogance a substitute for prayer;
He left to others all his treasures rare
And took away the counterfeit himself.

VIII

I'M landlord here; my guests give little care;
They pay no rent, nor grumble in their bed,
Nor envy others for the robes they wear,
All crimes of greed and selfishness forswear—
They dwell in harmony—*because they're dead.*



IX

THERE lies a man who lived to feast and revel:
Each drunken night offset the sober day—
Base appetites bring all to that same level—
Brave in his cups he oft would toast the Devil,
Who now is *toasting* him the debt to pay.

X

TIS poverty of mind that drives the soul
To seek oblivion with all senses mute,
Deaf, dumb and blind beside the toper's bowl;
Proclaim himself as void of self-control;
God gave to man and yet denied the brute.



XI

HERE lies a man of toil at his repose,
His half a century in labor spent.
Small recompense for what he undergoes,
Since all he got was meager food and clothes
And somewhat over for the landlord's rent.

XII

IF all would work, no toiler need despair;
Trails punishment hard after every fault;
An idle man makes some one do his share;
But few may profit by another's prayer
Or hide life's blunders in a marble vault.



XIII

SOME worship still the calf of molten gold,
Counting themselves much better than their kind;
Whereas they differ but in this, I 'm told:
The poor at death take with them all they hold—
The rich must leave their arrogance behind!

XIV

BUT there sleeps one who was unjust in trade;
To cheat the future was his last concern.
As rogues grow honest when the bargain's made,
He would by gift all penalties evade—
Endowed a church in hope he would not burn.



XV

THE boasting fool proclaims there is no God;
Yet bows to Death, by whom no choice is made
'Twixt those who wear the crown or bear the hod;
The sexton laughs and flings on him a clod
Who scorns the hope that lies beyond the spade.

XVI

WHEN Nature frowns, the earth and sky turn black;
Mad lightnings rip the angry clouds to shreds;
The oath of Storm King *thunders* in their track:
But out of silence strides the seismic wrack
That breaks the ribs of mountains where it treads.



XVII

THEN smiling Nature tints the sunset sky;
Her benediction spreads on land and sea;
Clouds dipt in wine are hung up there to dry
As weather-telling flags that prophesy
A bright and rosy day shall dawn for thee.

XVIII

AS SOLDIER lies in yonder nameless mound;
He took up arms for love of native land;
Remembrance died of some stray bullet-wound
And left him searching loved one, never found;
For whom he sought no one could understand.



XIX

THE savage shot his arrow at the plow—
All savage tribes the plowman put to rout—
But wars and armies grow more savage now;
Nor will the slaughter cease till humans vow
Those planning war, alone, shall fight it out.

XX

NO leaf has grown in vain whose grateful shade
Falls on a sleeping babe," the sexton said.
"All things have purpose, every man his trade,
The soldier carries arms—I bear the spade;
Death lulls to sleep those I must put to bed.



XXI

THE tomb of Hurry stands across the way;
To others master—to himself a slave;
Nor God's command to rest would he obey;
By crowding much into each single day
He shortened much his journey to the grave.

XXII

IN yonder vault is housed the man of Greed;
Ambition gave him wealth, but left him cold;
His wife's caress he took with scanty heed;
His rival now, with more indulgent creed,
Has all the love, the widow and the gold.



XXIII

WHEN woman loves, she breathes a single prayer,
Asking no more than love to match her own;
No sweeter incense has the world to spare,
But oh, the chill when she becomes aware
Her Altar 's nothing but a polished stone.

XXIV

FULL half the good in life we overrun,
As dogs, with greedy haste, gulp down their food;
How oft a youth, by vapid stranger won,
O'erlooks a lassie gentle as a nun—
A neighboring Venus 'neath a gingham hood.



XXV

HOW many wake from their Elysian dream
To find love's garden overgrown with weeds.
A constant level makes a sluggish stream,
While dashing waters catch the rainbow's gleam
To paint the trout with freckles while he feeds.

XXVI

APRETTY face with shining aureole
And eyes that lure as does the siren sea
Draws many a man upon a barren shoal;
But woman's love lifts high a human soul
And brims his cup with wine of Ecstasy.



XXVII

THE soul that glows from out a woman's eyes
Who loves, and loves as only woman can,
Is proof there is another paradise:
A soul so great must live beyond the skies
That can with love redeem a worthless man.

XXVIII

WERE I the guard of yonder pearly gate
I'd still be kind to all these patrons human
And overlook their frailties small or great—
Save his who had been brutal to his mate
Or faithless to a love-devoted woman.



XXIX

HOW slowly grow the virtues of the wise,
While evil springs without a single care;
How fiercely man will struggle for a prize
That seldom falls—and never satisfies—
When Heaven itself were his for just a prayer.

XXX

SOME paths have roses, others have the thorn;
Some mount the rocks that border on the sea;
Some lead through desert-sand as if in scorn
Of vine-clad valleys rich with fruit and corn—
And yet all reach the same eternity.



XXXI

ALL vices banquet at the flowing bowl,
But virtue never chants the ribald song.
Desires are steeds lashed to the chariot pole;
Let Reason drive lest we should lose control,
For hands get weaker while the steeds grow strong.

XXXII

PLEASURES are false that bring repentant pain:
The soaring hawk, however swift he fly,
Can not outstrip his shadow on the plain—
That low-flung specter follows till the twain
Alight together on the crag hard by.



XXXIII

IF gilded sin and common sin would tell
The crimes which bear the brand of overdrinking,
Who 'd make a thing or have it here to sell—
The *price* of which and *breath* of which is hell?
The truth would set the careless world a-thinking.

XXXIV

THE Power that made the world created man,
With mind to choose betwixt the good and ill;
The body dies, the spirit never can.
Then why should mortal question Heaven's plan?
Since God is God—and was—and ever will!

XXXV

WE may not even *locate* Heaven aright—
For *up* is from the earth that constant turns;
Then *up* is opposite or day or night;
If Heaven be up it must surround us quite,
With no location for the place that burns.

XXXVI

WHY doubt that which we can not understand?
We can not comprehend the things that be:
The ant upon the barren desert land
Believes the world is flat and made of sand,
Because, forsooth, it never saw the sea.

XXXVII

WE may not measure time without a clock—
How can we comprehend eternity?
As well dip out the ocean with a crock,
Or hurl below the fragment of a rock
To fill the countless fathoms of the sea.

XXXVIII

THIS monster world was made to swing in air
By that Electric Will that bids it go.
The Skeptic knows, when reason plays him fair,
Those countless myriad planets everywhere
Are moved by some Celestial Dynamo.



XXXIX

IF Chance could fashion but a little flower
With dainty perfume for each fairy thief,
And furnish it with sunshine and with shower,
Then Chance would be creator with the power
To build another world for unbelief.

XL

THOUGH none the Comet's mission comprehend,
Those blazing, spirit orbs we plainly see:
As though a loving God would constant send
Fleet messengers, whose journeys never end,
'Twixt earth and yonder vast Eternity.



XLI

ASKEPTIC oft the Heavenly power denies
And hurls the scoffer's wineglass to the floor;
The truth still lives—but there the scoffer lies.
The fire is out and ashes are his eyes ;
His mouth is shut—and I have closed the door.

XLII

IF everything in Heaven's great mystery
Were well explained, we could not understand:
We did not recognize the Deity
Ev'n though He came a-walking on the sea:
We doubted once the nail-prints in his hand.



XLIII

FARTHER than figures mathematic show
There speed the ever-flying Pleiades;
In orbit vaster than the mind may know:
In that Far Heaven no human thought can go,
And yet the eye of every mortal sees!

XLIV

AND if we told the children God lived where
The Pleiads swing so far beyond the moon,
They would believe and thither lift their prayer—
So strive to live that Death would take them there—
Since faith was ever childhood's blessed boon.



XLV

HOW bright the gems that crown night's atmosphere,
Self-lighted airships poising there on high,
Till like a shooting-star descending sheer
They volplane swiftly to our whirling sphere
To bear some waiting spirit to the sky.

XLVI

AT moon's command, old ocean ebbs and flows,
By skill of man are continents cut through;
Sun, earth and moon their awful power oppose,
And yet it needs them all to make the rose
That blushes fragrance to a drop of dew.



XLVII

MAN dives the sea and soars the azure sky;
Marvels of enginery his brain may plan;
Yet all achievements, when he comes to die,
Win naught of favor in the Master's eye
If he on earth love not his fellowman.

XLVIII

FAR more is gained by kindness than by strife;
How few who know the worth of little deeds;
Life's battles are not won with drum and fife;
A smile may change the trend of human life;
And gifts are measured ever by their needs.



XLIX

THAT well-worn path where many children go,
Leads to the spot where Optimist was lain;
The sunny life that kept his face aglow
Gave him a taste of Heaven here below
And set these pretty cherubs in his train.

L

IN yon far corner sleeps a Pessimist;
No mourners come but his neglected deeds;
He sowed no grain and likewise ground no grist;
Through finding fault, the good in life he missed;
No flowers for him save from the pitying weeds.



LI

THE mortal boasts his strength of brawn and brain;
His wireless wonders earth and ocean span;
Outsoars an eagle in his aeroplane;
Hurls armies forth to ply the craft of Cain—
And yet the tiny microbe kills the man.

LII

WHY should a mortal grumble at his fate?
Knows he the schooling that his nature needs?
When tutored well he struts among the great,
But left untaught, how simple is his state—
Not wiser than the brute the pasture feeds.

A decorative border with a repeating floral and scrollwork pattern surrounds the text.

LIII

TO save us from our self-indulgent will—
Although we fret and grumble at our lot—
Kind Nature throttles us and makes us ill;
Puts us to bed with powder, draught and pill,
And ofttimes saves our lives when we would not.

LIV

LET Sorrow play physician to the mind—
Without its grief there 's little to life's story;
Gold comes by fire and is by fire refined;
The freshened rose calls not the storm unkind;
It needs the clouds to catch the sunset's glory.



LV

TIME is the tapestry where mortals weave
Life-pictures in an endless caravan;
Though much unlike designs they first conceive,
One golden glow all somber spots relieve—
The Master Weaver's—"Peace! Good-will to man!"

LVI

HOW blest the feet that tread in righteous ways!
How blest the heart that loves and knows not guile,
The hand that 's helpful and the lip that prays—
The eye that shall behold with raptured gaze
The benediction of the Master's smile.



LVII

WE come into the world and know it not;
We live in faith until we learn to doubt;
We use our brain to gather, scheme and plot;
At last, with enmity and greed forgot,
Come back to childish faith—and then go out.

LVIII

THE burning taper doth the wax consume,
Which, like our bodies, serves its purpose well;
The more the flame, the faster flows the rheum—
But there 's no burning more beyond the tomb—
We snuff it out to cover up the smell.

LIX


THE fool hath said, 'The *future* is in doubt—
I 'll have my fling in revels while alive!'
He learns before the *present*'s half worn out,
Grim Retribution rides the selfsame route,
Where all may pity him, but few may thrive.

LX


NATURE supplies a stimulus within
If we would bid our sluggish senses wake;
Why should we live to feast and stuff the skin
And boasting flirt with more indulgent sin?
The brute gives answer with far less at stake.



LXI

OD made the birds and melody took wing;
Its perfume tells who made the matchless rose.
Our words, like bees, bear honey or a sting;
Our lives give echo to the songs we sing—
A decent conscience fears no future woes.

LXII

UR worries kill more than the storms at sea;
They kneel beside us when we are at prayer.
Oh, what a world to live in this would be
But for the cost—not e'en the grave is free;
Eternal debt will find us even there.

LXIII

DON Cynic held religion obsolete—
Perhaps he changed his mind when Death was near—
He differed from his Maker by conceit;
Gaunt sophistry ate from his heart the meat;
His autopsy showed little but a sneer.

LXIV

BUT there sleeps one who mourned a world of sin
But overlooked his own—thus it befell
Saint Peter could not rightly let him in,
But gently bade him take his parchment skin
Where his asbestos face might serve him well.

LXV

YOUR humblest grave is yonder quiet plot,
Where lie the ashes of old Parson Good;
He lived for others and himself forgot;
But little deeds, on earth remembered not,
In Heaven count most—*so I have understood.*

LXVI

THE best of many creeds, a mother's prayer;
No grip of sin would hold if memory
Would lead us often to the old armchair;
Life holds no treasured picture to compare
With children bowing at the Mother's knee.



LXVII

HOW pompously conceited men debate
On what is best to do with womankind;
Assuming to be monarchs of her fate
When Heaven created her to be the mate—
As wise, as good—*and quite as much refined.*

LXVIII

IN all things, woman more than does her share
And hers should be one-half the revenue:
Her husband, home and children all her care—
Not till she takes that last long thoroughfare
Can one perceive how much had been her due.

LXIX

DIVINELY formed! God's masterpiece art thou;
Beyond the painter's skill, the sculptor's dream;
Fair as the sun-glow on the mountain's brow;
Man's lure and guide from Eden's blush till now
And in life's drama still the roseate theme.

LXX

WITH precious gems are woman's charms arrayed,
Yet is her haloed love a choicer boon
Than all the jewels dug from earth's dark shade,
Like star-bits fallen when the heavens were made
Or sculptor's chips dropped from the chiseled moon.

LXXI

TAKE *Gender* out of morals, women cry;
Have men bring us the virtues they demand.
Set *Decency* in court the man to try
With that same law they judge the woman by—
Let man be pure or wear the scarlet brand.

LXXII

AMAN with worthless, balky horse, alas,
Will trade him off or shoot him for his hide;
Why not a woman, mated with an ass,
Trade off the beast or turn him out to grass—
And mark the saving on the profit side?

LXXIII

WITH secret thoughts and deeds writ on the face,
How few would venture out save in a fog;
If dogs were fashioned from the human race
We 'd have to borrow many a winsome grace
Of trust and faithfulness—or spoil the dog.

LXXIV

A KINDLY thought is more than half a prayer;
Each smile begets another smile for you;
A kiss will oft a breaking heart repair,
Erase a wrinkle from the brow of care,
Or plant a rose where roses are but few.



LXXV

LOVE is the source of all—keeps Heaven alight
Where golfers drive the stars in midnight play,
Like meteors athwart the links of night,
While angels trail their filmy robes in flight
To make night's mystery—*the Milky Way.*

LXXVI

THROUGH senseless fear is Death so much maligned!
Those who have met him made no great ado—
Nor to return have ever been inclined;
The open door he deftly hides behind,
And none has shown a fear while passing through.

LXXVII

YOUR drowsy nerves can no sensation feel;
We know not when we sleep nor when we die!
From out this tenement the soul will steal
Nor shut the door its absence to conceal,
Nor stop to close the shutters of the eye.

LXXVIII

FROM seeming Death have myriads returned,
Yet not a single pang did any feel:
The phantom barge from which they half-discerned
The Holy Citadel, for which they yearned,
Had borne them hence had Death but pushed the keel.

LXXIX

SRIM Death, stern mariner of worlds to come,
Hath mortal never kindly word for thee?
Shall not the blind, the ailing and the dumb
Pay unto thee their first encomium
For passage to the shores of Ecstasy?

LXXX

WE build a house with matter we call *what*
By using force from whence we can not show;
By some strange motive of the mind begot,
We dig a grave in which our bodies rot—
Philosophy beyond this can not go.

LXXXI

LIFE in minute electrons doth begin;
Eternity is only Time set free;
Philosophy 's a garment far too thin
To wrap a dying mortal's conscience in!
We 're safer with the Man of Galilee.

LXXXII

LOVE all these confided to my keep
As mortals lodging at a sacred inn;
To dust their bodies changing while they sleep;
May not their evil sink into the deep
And earth absorb the odor of the sin?

LXXXIII

THEIR very silence seems an endless plea;
Think you that Mercy never listens now?
Behind Creation stands the Deity
With Hope raised high for all mankind to see
God's love redeem the world on Olive's brow.

LXXXIV

UPON the cross the thief repentant cries;
The shortest and the soonest answered prayer—
'O Lord remember me!' The Lord replies,
'Today thou 'lt be with me in Paradise!'
Which takes away from mortals all despair.

LXXXV

FOR one who digs at graves, you seem well bred—
 Whence comes this wisdom? meaning no offense!
 “From these I learn!” the quaint gravedigger said,
 “They 're bound to tell the truth to me when dead,
And wisdom after all is common sense!”

LXXXVI

THUS in the sexton's words the truth I read:
 The love of God is round about us all
 Leaving no path for Doubt or Fear to tread;
 'T was man that sinned, but it was God who bled—
 And Heaven's pardon far exceeds the fall.





MY BOY

By Fred Emerson Brooks

*My boy went to war with a smile and a tear;
He went like a soldier with never a fear.
When soldiers are needed somebody must go—
When Liberty calls, shall a Mother say No?
God gave me a hero—I yield him with pride.
And gladly would go marching on by his side.
There is nothing on earth that can measure the joy
A fond Mother has in the love of her boy.*

*My boy loves his country—his flag of the free;
And how can I blame him—he takes it from me
The Mother who bore him and taught him to pray
Is proud of her soldier boy marching away.
I kiss him good-morning, I kiss him good-night;
I see him all day—never out of my sight.
A boy from his Mother can never depart
He may go from her presence but not from her heart.*

*What tho' she have many or have but the one
'Tis hard for a Mother to part with her Son
No soldier so handsome, so martial as he;
He's always a hero, my Boy is to me.
In the last fond embrace I was hugging him so
My arms would not act—they refused to let go.
There's never a picture that angels enjoy
Like that of a Mother in prayer for her boy.*

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